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SUBJECT: HOR NAMHONG WELCOMES GROWING U.S. COOPERATION IN ASEAN

REF: 08 PHNOM PENH 701

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister (FM) Hor Namhong focused on ASEAN, the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (KRT) and U.S. support for the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) joining regional and larger international institutions during EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) and U.S. Ambassador for ASEAN Affairs Scot Marciel's March 2 courtesy call in advance of the second annual U.S.-Cambodia bilateral dialogue. Hor Namhong welcomed Secretary Clinton's visit to the ASEAN Secretariat and requested that she consider a trip to Phnom Penh after she attends the ASEAN Post Ministerial Meeting in July. The FM dismissed public criticism of the RGC over the barring of a Cambodian civil society representative from talks at the recent ASEAN Summit.

12. (SBU) Hor Namhong thanked the U.S. for its bilateral assistance and asked the USG to provide more financial support to the KRT. He also asked the USG to support Cambodia's bid for a non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council (UNSC) and request to join APEC, and he briefly discussed ongoing land and maritime border negotiations with Thailand. The FM's strong focus on regional issues and the RGC's desire to join the UNSC and APEC are positive indications that Cambodia wishes to step up its international engagement. END SUMMARY.

INCREASING U.S. ENGAGEMENT WITH ASEAN

13. (SBU) Hor Namhong said that ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan sent a positive report of his meeting with Secretary Clinton, and that the ASEAN Foreign Ministers viewed her visit to the Secretariat in Jakarta as a sign that U.S. cooperation with ASEAN would continue to grow. Ambassador Marciel reiterated that the U.S. would work hard to improve relations with ASEAN and that the U.S. would begin the process of pursuing accession to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. He confirmed that Secretary Clinton would attend the ASEAN Post Ministerial Meeting in Thailand in July, and Hor Namhong requested that she consider a trip to Phnom Penh while she is in the region.

CAMBODIA AND THE ASEAN SUMMIT

14. (SBU) Hor Namhong stated that last weekend's ASEAN Summit had been productive and stressed the importance of the ratified ASEAN Charter. When asked about the barring of a Cambodian civil society representative from the talks, Hor Namhong repeated his public statements that the Summit organizers excluded the purported

Cambodian representative after the RGC delegation noted that the representative did not appear in the ASEAN Charter's list of registered NGOs. He said that the RGC wanted to play a role in the selection of Cambodian civil society interlocutors. (NOTE: The Cambodian representative and his NGO are not known to anyone at this Embassy, and his selection is a bit of a mystery. END NOTE.) Ambassador Marciel remarked that Cambodia being raised in the same context as Burma was not good for its image.

BILATERAL ASSISTANCE AND THE KHMER ROUGE TRIBUNAL

15. (SBU) Hor Namhong expressed his gratitude for U.S. assistance in basic education and health, and for the recent donation of 40 trucks to the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces. He highlighted the much-appreciated work of the Peace Corps. He also asked Ambassador Marciel how the U.S. could contribute more financial support to the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), often called the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (KRT), noting that Japan had pledged \$20-\$21 million towards the UN side of the tribunal and that the Cambodian side of the court would soon run out of money. Ambassador Marciel said that the U.S. hoped to contribute more funding but cautioned that the U.S. government budget process moved slowly. Hor Namhong also noted that although there had been media speculation about corruption in the KRT, there had been four to seven independent audits of the tribunal that had found no cases of corruption. He added that the RGC was working with the UN to develop mechanisms to promote greater transparency in the KRT.

CAMBODIA IN APEC AND AT THE UNSC

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16. (SBU) Hor Namhong repeated past requests (Reftel) for the U.S. to support Cambodia's bid to join the UN Security Council (UNSC) in 2013. (NOTE: Elections will be held in 2012, and the Republic of Korea is reportedly also running. END NOTE.) He said that all ASEAN members, plus 61 other countries, had confirmed their support for the Cambodians' bid. He also asked that the U.S. push to lift the moratorium on new members joining APEC and support Cambodia's accession to the group. He stressed that more involvement in regional and international institutions would advance Cambodia's development. Ambassador Marciel promised to take the RGC's requests back to Washington for consideration.

PREAH VIHEAR BORDER DISPUTE; OVERLAPPING CLAIMS AREA

17. (SBU) When discussing border issues, the Foreign Minister said that the Thais had agreed to refer to a 2000 MOU regarding demarcation of the entire land border, including the disputed border area around the UNESCO World Heritage Site at Preah Vihear. He said that the RGC would push to use a map of the border made by the French during the protectorate era in 1904-1908. He also said that the RGC and Thai government had agreed to bring in technical experts to help map the maritime border, including an overlapping claims area proposed to be developed jointly, and determine how the two countries could share revenues from potential oil and gas resources.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) Hor Namhong's strong focus on regional issues and the RGC's aspiration to join APEC and the UNSC signal that Cambodia is eager to play a more active role on the international stage. Increased engagement at the regional and global levels would, as the FM pointed out, further Cambodia's development agenda. A greater international focus on Cambodia could also persuade the RGC to accelerate reforms in areas important to the U.S., such as rule of law and good governance, trade facilitation and economic growth, and security cooperation. However, as illustrated recently by the spat over the participation of civil society at the ASEAN Summit, the RGC still has a lot to learn to improve its international image and become more fully integrated in the international community.

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